

Lookout Butte Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 99,600 acres

The Lookout Butte WSA (ID-16-48A/OR-3-194) is located in the southeast corner of Malheur County, Oregon, and the southwest corner of Owyhee County, Idaho. It lies approximately 50 miles south of Jordan Valley, Oregon, and 25 miles east of McDermitt, Nevada (see Table 1). The boundary of the WSA consists of both high and low standard dirt roads, a way in the southeastern portion of the WSA and one adjacent parcel of state land. There are no dead-end roads that enter the WSA.

The study area contains 99,600 acres of public land; this total includes 3,950 acres of split-estate land. In addition, within the boundary of the WSA are two 640 acre parcels of land owned by the State of Idaho.

The WSA is a large, flat to gently rolling area containing several playas and four gently sloping buttes. Defeat Butte (5,710 feet) in Oregon is located near the center of the study area. Lookout Butte (5,640 feet) is two miles west of the WSA which is more than two miles long and one mile wide. An unnamed butte lies one mile southwest of Lookout Butte. Spring Butte (5,515 feet) is located in the northeast corner of the portion of the study area in Idaho. Spring Creek crosses the eastern boundary through a shallow draw about three miles south of Spring Butte. In the southwest corner of the WSA, Tent Creek forms a small canyon which disappears and then reappears in a twisting configuration in the southeast corner of the study area. Midway along the eastern boundary, a low rim extends east from Stoney Corral. It is located along the headwaters of Toppin Creek.

Except for the buttes and a portion of Tent Creek canyon, none of the features are pronounced. Vegetation consists primarily of sagebrush, grasses and scattered herbaceous perennials.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Final Oregon Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) published in December 1989.

Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative; an all wilderness alternative with acquisitions in which the mineral estate of 3,950 acres of split-estate land in Oregon and the 1,280 acres of state inholdings in Idaho would be acquired through purchase or exchange if the owners are willing¹; and a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report. These lands are shown on the Lookout Butte Proposal map.

¹This alternative was called the Enhanced Wilderness Alternative in the Final Oregon Wilderness EIS.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

0 acres recommended for wilderness

**99,600 acres recommended for
nonwilderness²**

The recommendation for the Lookout Butte WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and release the entire 99,600 acres for uses other than wilderness (see Lookout Butte Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative with acquisitions. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man, primarily rangeland developments, which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.

Wilderness characteristics are limited in this area while opportunities to enhance livestock grazing by construction of new range projects and allocation of additional AUMs exist.

Resource values other than wilderness used in making the recommendation include a potential increase in livestock grazing use and a brush-control project that would allocate additional AUMs, construction of proposed range projects and continued vehicle access on existing ways for the maintenance of numerous livestock facilities.

Currently, all public land in the WSA is leased for livestock grazing. The current livestock use level is approximately 2,626 AUMs within portions of the three allotments in the WSA. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of livestock forage within affected pastures that is currently available, but not allocated, would be realized under no wilderness. Approximately 360 of the AUMs are within the WSA. In a proposed range project, brush on 10,800 acres would be removed by burning; 880 acres are within the WSA. This brush-control project would produce enough livestock forage to support an additional 31 AUMs in the WSA. It also would improve habitat variety for wildlife but sagebrush-dependent species such as the limited populations of sage grouse would be displaced to adjoining habitats with brush cover.

Range projects proposed for construction that would improve livestock distribution and management include one mile of fence and two reservoirs. Two additional reservoirs would be built to replace two windmills in order to reduce maintenance costs.

²There are 34,400 acres of the WSA located in Idaho. The recommendation for this portion of the WSA is included in the Idaho Wilderness Study Report. There are 65,200 acres in Oregon. The recommendation for this portion of the WSA is included in the Oregon Wilderness Study Report.

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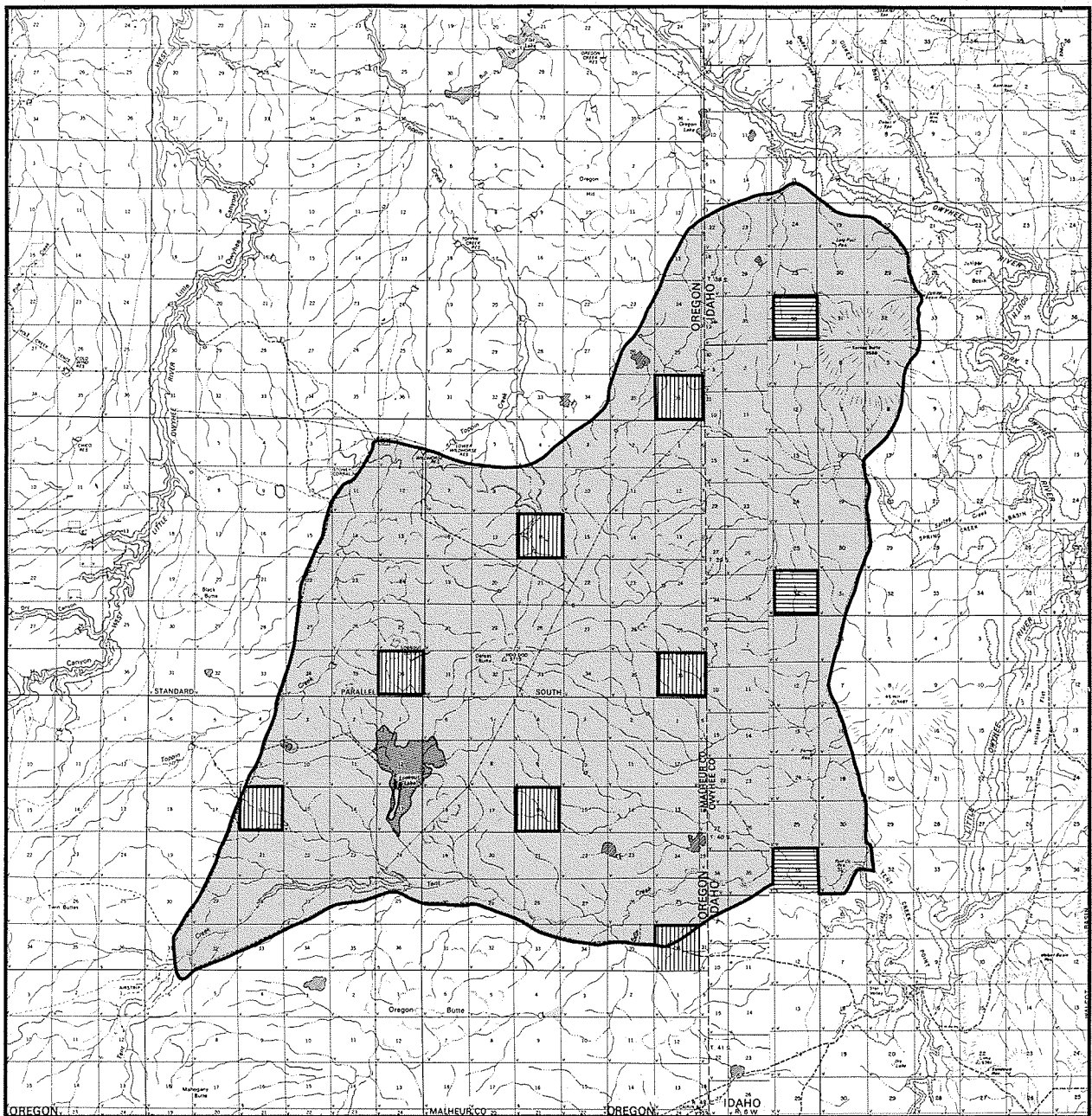
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RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



SPLIT ESTATE



RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS



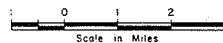
STATE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED
FOR WILDERNESS



PRIVATE



Scale in Miles

ID-16-48A
LOOKOUT BUTTE
PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
LOOKOUT BUTTE WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

	<u>OREGON</u>	<u>IDAHO</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	61,250	34,400	95,650
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	3,950	0	3,950
Inholdings (state, private)	0	1,280	1,280
Total	65,200	35,680	100,880

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	0	0	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0	0	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0	0	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0	0	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0	0	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0	0	0
State land (outside WSA)	0	0	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	61,250	34,400	95,650
Split Estate	3,950	0	3,950
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	65,200	34,400	99,600
Inholdings (state, private)	0	1,280	1,280

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The WSA appears to be generally natural. Eighty-six percent of the WSA is pristine, not influenced by unnatural features. However, 50 interior unnatural features influence 14 percent of the WSA. These features consist of 28 reservoirs, three windmills, a dirt airstrip, a bladed state line (15 miles), two fences (17 miles bladed and five miles unbladed) and 14 ways (totaling 48 miles). These features are scattered throughout the study area. Unnatural features outside of the WSA that affect the naturalness of the area consist of boundary roads, a large metal water storage tank and several reservoirs.

Approximately 100 mule deer and 50 pronghorn antelope make limited use of the WSA. Pronghorn use is restricted from the late spring to autumn because of severe winter conditions. Mule deer inhabit many of the canyons in adjacent areas; however, the WSA is not a favorable habitat for either big game species because of a lack of topographic features and the nearly homogeneous stands of Wyoming big sagebrush which are predominant in the WSA. Raptors inhabit the deep canyons to the west, north and east of the WSA. Incidental excursions by raptors searching for prey are made into the study area but very little nesting occurs because of the absence of suitable topography.

B. Solitude

The vast proportions of the WSA, combined with the slightly rolling terrain and the waist-high vegetation which covers it, provides sufficient screening to result in an outstanding opportunity to experience solitude. The uniform shape and large size of the study area substantially enhances a visitor's ability to experience solitude. Outside sights and sounds affecting the WSA's opportunity for solitude are minor and are associated with grazing management activities, traffic on boundary roads and low-level aircraft flights.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation are available in the WSA. However, opportunities for activities such as hiking, backpacking, camping, hunting, photography and horseback riding are not outstanding because the study area lacks scenic quality, diversity of landforms and challenging terrain. Occasional hunting for deer and antelope occurs in the study area but game populations are small compared with nearby areas and hunting pressure is light. Vehicle use is also light because of a lack of either attractive features or activities. Total recreation use is less than 100 visitor days per year.

D. Special Features

There are no special features in the WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the Lookout Butte WSA would add an ecosystem not presently represented in Oregon but presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented in the NWPS by three designated area with 76,699 acres. There are 102 other BLM areas in the two states under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
	<u>NEVADA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
	<u>OREGON</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Lookout Butte WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3
**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Lookout Butte WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. There is one designated wilderness area within the region and 73 study areas recommended for wilderness designation are within 100 miles of the WSA.

Manageability

The WSA could be managed as wilderness. The area is relatively large and is mostly public land and possesses a large degree of naturalness. Manageability would be improved if the two parcels of state land and the mineral estate of the split estate lands were acquired. Potential adverse impacts from access to and incompatible surface-disturbing activities on these parcels could make management of the area difficult if these lands were not acquired. Casual mineral exploration that is not projected to lead to development would cause short-term and localized impacts to the area's naturalness.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The geology, energy and mineral resources of Lookout Butte WSA were evaluated by interpreting existing literature, reviewing mining and mineral leasing records and by a reconnaissance geochemical survey. Technical details of the geochemical evaluation are given in a BLM mineral resource assessment report for the Lookout Butte WSA.

Based upon indirect evidence, the WSA is considered to have a moderate potential for oil and gas. Also based on indirect evidence, the study area is considered to have a moderate potential for geothermal resources. Indirect evidence obtained during a reconnaissance geochemical assessment of the WSA indicates a moderate potential for uranium on approximately 1,780 acres in the northwestern portion of the study area. As of October 16, 1987, there were no geothermal or oil and gas leases in the WSA.

Based upon direct geologic evidence, the WSA is considered to have a high potential for the occurrence of basalt aggregate material. However, because of the lack of demand which reflects the low level of economic development and remoteness of the area, no community pits and/or material sites have been designated.

Based upon indirect evidence (i.e., a reconnaissance geochemical assessment of the WSA), approximately 1,400 acres in the central portion of the study area are considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of beryllium and approximately 1,480 acres, also in the central portion of the WSA, are considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of silver. As of October 16, 1987, there were no mining claims in the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA ID-16-48A/OR-3-194 (LOOKOUT BUTTE)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS WITH ACQUISITIONS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	In the absence of wilderness designation, projected activities would impair wilderness values on approximately 3,680 acres with further declines from other potential uses over the long term.	Wilderness designation of 99,600 acres and the closure of 48 miles of ways would result in protection and enhancement of existing wilderness values.	Wilderness designation of 100,880 acres and the closure of 48 miles of ways would protect and enhance wilderness values.
Impacts on Energy and Mineral Development	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.
Impacts on Vegetation	Brush would be removed from 880 acres. Utilization of key forage species would increase overall from 35-50%. The bunchgrass component would be reduced on 40-80 acres.	48 miles of ways would revegetate. Little or no change would occur to vegetation on the remainder of the area.	48 miles of ways would revegetate. Little or no change would occur to vegetation on the remainder of the area.
Impacts on Wildlife	Wildlife populations of game and nongame species would sustain minor and temporary levels of harassment. Proposed actions would benefit wildlife by providing new water sources and adding habitat variety.	Wildlife habitat and populations would be maintained on 99,600 acres designated wilderness.	Wildlife habitat and populations would be maintained on 100,880 acres designated wilderness.
Impacts on Livestock Grazing	An additional allocation of 816 AUMs of available forage would be realized. An additional 361 AUMs would be allocated to livestock from projects. Construction of 4 reservoirs and 1 mile of fence would facilitate livestock management.	Closure of 48 miles of ways would cause inconvenience and a slight increase in costs to livestock operators. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of currently available forage and an additional allocation of 361 AUMs from projects would be foregone.	Closure of 48 miles of ways would cause inconvenience and a slight increase in costs to livestock operators. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of currently available forage and an additional allocation of 361 AUMs from projects would be foregone.
Impacts on Recreation Use	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.
Impacts on Local Personal Income	Annual local personal income would increase by approximately \$14,000.	Annual local personal income would remain at approximately \$33,000.	Annual local personal income would remain at approximately \$33,000.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Livestock grazing would increase by 1,177 AUMs. Overall recreation use would remain at less than 100 visitor days per year. Annual local personal income generated from resource outputs in the WSA would increase by approximately \$14,000. There were no social factors identified with the study of the Lookout Butte WSA.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal review of the Draft EIS, 16 comments specifically addressing the Lookout Butte WSA were received. Of those, five were written and 11 were oral statements received at public hearings on the Draft and Supplement EIS. All of the commenters supported wilderness designation with two specifically supporting the all wilderness, with acquisitions, alternative.

Three commenters proposed combining the Lookout Butte WSA with adjacent WSAs to make it part of the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness. These commenters also said that the planned range developments, including the increased allocation of AUMs, should not be allowed. Cited, too, was that the low potential for mineral occurrence was not a strong reason to preclude the area from wilderness designation. One commenter mentioned the quality of the grasslands in the WSA and the number of natural communities present on the large vegetated playa adding that the "immensity of the area makes it a high quality wilderness area."

No WSA-specific comments were received from any federal, state or local agencies. There were two comment letters received on the Final EIS specific to this WSA. These supported an expansion of the all wilderness alternative.

Oral comments concerning the analysis addressed in the Final EIS stated that wilderness values of Tent Creek have not been adequately addressed; to protect the natural resources of the WSA, more than the enhanced alternative is needed (i.e., more upland area should be added); this WSA should be added to the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness; and *Downingia insignis* should be addressed in the EIS appendix because it occurs near the WSA boundary and probably also occurs within the WSA.